

ON PAGE **AI**

NEW YORK TIMES
26 December 1985

Russian Said to Predict Israeli Ties And Increased Jewish Emigration

By **BERNARD GWERTZMAN**
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 25 — A Soviet diplomat was reported today to have told a representative here of an American Jewish organization that he believes Moscow will restore diplomatic relations with Israel in February and dramatically increase the number of Jews permitted to emigrate to Israel.

The conversation, which occurred a few days ago, was disclosed in a telephone interview today by Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.

According to Rabbi Hier, the Soviet diplomat, attached to the embassy here, initiated the luncheon and seemed eager to put across two points. These were that he "thinks" there will be full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Soviet Union in February, before the Communist Party congress that month, and that Moscow is going to allow many more Jews to leave than are permitted now.

Rabbi Hier asked that the names of the diplomat and the representative of the Wiesenthal Center not be mentioned. He said that the substance of the discussion had been conveyed to the Israeli Embassy in Washington. The Israelis said the Soviet diplomat, who is officially listed as one of many first secretaries in the embassy, was known to them for years as a K.G.B. agent who has specialized in Jewish affairs.

The Israelis speculated that the diplomat was unlikely to have spoken as he had with the Jewish representative except under instructions, Rabbi Hier said.

Cautioned Is Stressed

Israeli officials said, however, that while they were interested in such reports, they were waiting for firm indications from Moscow that a more conciliatory approach toward Israel and Soviet Jews was planned.

In a separate conversation, Rabbi Hier's representative confirmed the essence of his talks but stressed the need for caution, since there has been no official indication from Moscow of an imminent change in policy. The Soviet diplomat did not respond to a reporter's request to talk to him.

This was the latest in a series of reports about possible improvement in Soviet relations with Israel that have circulated in recent months. As with other such reports, there is a plausibility to it, but no confirmation from the Soviet side.

What is clear from the pattern of

meetings and conversations, Reagan Administration officials said, is that Moscow seems interested in maintaining contacts both with Israeli officials and with leading Jews in the West.

Moscow Seeks Peace Conference

Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel has said Israel would be willing to attend a Middle East peace conference — long sought by Moscow and more recently by Jordan — only if the Soviet Union restored diplomatic relations, which it severed at the time of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Mr. Peres has also said such a conference should only serve as a vehicle to allow Israel and a Jordanian-Palestinian group to negotiate directly.

Mr. Peres met in October at the United Nations with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Eduard A. Shevardnadze, and raised the possibility of diplomatic relations and eased Soviet emigration rules for Jews. Mr. Shevardnadze, who was reported by Mr. Peres to have been affable in the conversation, told him that Moscow was then preoccupied with preparing for the November summit meeting with President Reagan but would look at such questions afterward.

At the summit meeting Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader, agreed to come to Washington next year, possibly as early as June, and Mr. Reagan agreed to go to Moscow in 1987.

Rabbi Hier speculated that Moscow was interested in blunting criticism among American Jews before Mr. Gorbachev came to the United States. During the Geneva summit meeting, Rabbi Hier's group was active in protesting the treatment of Soviet Jews, as were some other organizations.

He said this could be "a new and significant development."

The Simon Wiesenthal Center is involved primarily in studying Nazi

crimes and contemporary anti-Semitism. Rabbi Hier said the group had become increasingly involved in Soviet affairs because of its concern over conditions for Jews in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Peres has also proposed to Moscow, through intermediaries, that there be a large-scale increase in emigration to Israel of Soviet Jews. After reaching a high of nearly 60,000 in 1979, the number of Jewish emigrants has fallen below 1,000 in recent years.

Mr. Peres suggested that the Soviet Union allow charter planes to take the emigrants directly to Israel, insuring that they not go instead to the United States via Vienna, which is where they fly now when they leave the Soviet Union. But Israeli officials said they had not received any reply from Moscow to the proposal, made several months ago.

Senior Soviet diplomats have had talks with Israeli diplomats in Paris and Washington in recent months, Israeli officials said, but no promises were made.

Some Arab nations, such as Egypt and Jordan, have recommended to Moscow that it restore diplomatic relations with Israel to help improve chances for a Middle East peace conference. They have contended that Moscow is unable to play a significant role in Middle East diplomacy as long as it lacks an official presence in Israel.

Officially, the Soviet Union has taken the position that it would not restore diplomatic relations with Israel until Israel agreed to return all the lands it occupied in the 1967 war.